

# The Maneuver Shooter Program:

## Multiplying the Efficiency of Indirect Fires



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**T**he lieutenant was used to being this close to his adversaries, but never this vulnerable. The desert's topography offered no security. He and his soldiers were as easily visible to the three BMPs as they were to him. One glance from the BMPs in the wrong direction, and there was sure to be trouble.

The lieutenant knew it was time to draw upon his call-for-fire (CFF) training. As a new Bradley Commander, he had not yet been exposed to the repetitive CFF training that his other comrades had.

Being on the line looking directly at the foe while your crew hurriedly tried to remount a thrown track was not "part of the plan," at least not his plan. Now, with nowhere to run and the lives of his soldiers depending on the actions of the next several moments, the lieutenant felt the sting of responsibility and overwhelming pressure.

To his relief, the fire support officer (FSO) answered him on the first call. To his horror, the enemy seemed to note

their presence and began closing the 2000-meter gap between them. Now more desperate than ever, the lieutenant hurried his data, trying to estimate an accurate grid coordinate for the moving BMPs. He reported his information and continued the drill.

Throughout this desperate and sometimes frantic event, he never considered reporting the Bradley's location. It seemed unimportant at the time. The only thing that mattered was getting rid of the immediate threat.

The fire mission was executed, and the round landed short. The radio went silent, and no effects were reported.

History's battlefields are littered with incidents of fratricide. Too often these incidents can be attributed to a lack of understanding of the battlefield systems being used. The delivery of fires, be it from artillery, naval gunfire or close air support (CAS), is among the leading culprits of our darkest moments in combat.

The Maneuver Shooter Program is a tool meant to weaken the grip of igno-

rance. Its purpose is to ensure fires are not only safer for the troops on the line, but also a more lethal and effective force multiplier.

This article discusses the Maneuver Shooter Program, including its training strategy for teaching maneuver soldiers CFF procedures and giving them an appreciation of the requirements for and time it takes to clear fires.

**The Training Strategy.** Simply put, the Maneuver Shooter Program is a training plan to educate key leaders in frontline positions. The foundation of the program is based on CFF skills.

Forward observers (FOs) are positioned on the battlefield to gain as much insight into the enemy situation as possible; however, it is unrealistic to expect a "total" realization of battlefield activity with the limited numbers of FA FOs. The Maneuver Shooter Program is based on the premise that the more trained CFF eyes we have on the battlefield, the more effective our combat power will be.

The CFF fundamentals are taught in three phases: classroom instruction, training on the ground unit armory device full-crew interactive simulation

trainer (GUARDFIST) and live-fire exercises. The target audience for each of these phases, at a minimum, is the maneuver battalion and company commanders, scouts, platoon leaders, platoon sergeants and track commanders. Phases I and II should be conducted at least semiannually.

The content of the Maneuver Shooter Program is aimed at the most basic CFF procedures. As units gain proficiency in those tasks, the program should introduce them to more complicated scenarios requiring greater understanding of the fire support system. The additional training includes moving target drills, fire support doctrine, integrating essential fire support tasks (EFSTs) into troop leading procedures (TLPs), etc.

The frequency of the Maneuver Shooter Program phases and the lengths of training in each phase are recommendations for sustainment training after the program has been established and maneuver units trained. The phases for units in the infantile stages of training may need to be increased in frequency and length.

*Phase I—Classroom Instruction.* This phase is an eight-hour block of instruction covering the basic principles and techniques of effective CFF procedures. The best environment to perform this class would be in a GUARDFIST. However, the absence of this system should not prevent commanders from executing this essential training. The primary trainers should be the company fire support NCO (FSNCO) and FSO.

*Phase II—GUARDFIST.* In this phase, the student applies the knowledge gained in Phase I. Each leader is involved in a one-day period of hands-on CFF training using GUARDFIST. The focus is on accurate target location, correct CFF procedures and correct adjustment procedures. The FSNCO should be the primary trainer for this phase. Continual feedback from trainer to student is key to the success of this training.

*Phase III—Live Fire.* This phase is executed during scheduled Field Artillery and mortar live-fire events. It is “Phase II” live training in a real environment. During this drill, potential maneuver shooters execute their CFF drills and can see the effects of indirect fire. Battalions should take advantage of observation points (OPs) located close to the impact area to observe close-in fires (up to 200 meters) and their effects.

When there are not enough live-fire training events available for maneuver

shooter training, a good substitute would be the close combat tactical trainer (CCTT).

The results of the program are that maneuver has a greater understanding of fire support along frontline traces. The maneuver commander has increased confidence in his unit’s abilities to fight and survive. But do maneuver shooters have enough training and knowledge to execute each CFF mission in every situation safely and efficiently?

CFF procedures are only a subcomponent of a multi-functional system. A better understanding of what happens once the CFF has been passed to the FSO will increase the efficiency of its requestors.

“Where the hell is my fire mission?”—more of an angry statement than a question, the staff sergeant nervously watched the lead T-80 tanks creep toward him in the valley below his Abrams’ hide position on the ridge.

During their movement-to-contact, Tiger Six’s orders had been to go to the crest of the ridge and look for the enemy. When he reported the enemy tank company moving toward them, Tiger Six’s last orders were “Get the FSO to drop DPICM [dual-purpose improved conventional munitions] on their butt to slow them down long enough for us to get in position on the ridge for a hasty ambush—but don’t compromise your location.”

Having been an Abrams Tank Commander for more than a year, he knew

that even the realism of the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, California, had not made him feel this anxious. The pressure in combat was an entirely new level of anxiety.

“We can take ‘em, Chief,” the driver whispered.

“Well if we don’t get some artillery soon, we just might do that! I don’t want those bastards to get away.”

Only 90 seconds had passed since the Tank Commander had transmitted his CFF, but as the T-80s neared, the time seemed to slow to a standstill.

“Mustang One Eight, this is Bulldog Five... where is my fire? Over.”

“Stand by... Out.” was the response.

Irritated and impatient, the Tank Commander felt compelled to resolve the situation himself.

“Alright boys, let’s roll. Gunner, heat, one tank.”

“Identified,” the gunner responded.

“Up,” the loader informed.

“Fire!”

“On the waaay!”

The first T-80 tank blew up. As the Abrams crew took a bead on the second T-80, the radio exploded: “Bulldog Five, this is Tiger Six. What the hell is going on up there—we aren’t in position yet?”

As Tiger Six yelled into the radio, the enemy tanks reacted by establishing a firing line and began a hasty attack.

Maneuver shooters must understand the time it takes to clear fires—especially, as in this scenario—on targets of opportunity during a movement-to-con-



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tact where friendly forces are moving within close proximity to the targets. Without carefully clearing fires, the results could be the same as in the first scenario: fratricide.

Indirect fires were essential for the tank company's hasty ambush to work. But the maneuver shooter did not exercise the tactical patience for indirect fires to make the maneuver plan work.

Maneuver soldiers down to the lowest possible level need to understand how and why fires are cleared. Knowledge of this process and the role fires play in the overall plan give maneuver shooters a reason to exercise patience in difficult situations.

Based on the knowledge and experience of the maneuver soldiers to be trained and the types of missions they must execute, each Maneuver Shooter Program's contents must be tailored for the maneuver units.

**Fire Support Battle Drills.** The CFF training in the Maneuver Shooter Program gives the maneuver commander a basic foundation to begin refining his fire support battle drills. Essentially this process neutralizes the enemy with minimal risk to friendly units. An important part of the unit's successful fires is a quick, efficient method for clearing fires.

There are several issues with clearing fires, but for purposes of this article, I discuss only three: target location, understanding procedures and knowledge of the fire support system.

**Target Location.** The Maneuver Shooter Program addresses this weakness in the system by forcing the students to practice locating and directing fire on notional targets. However, faulty target data is still a major nemesis of effective fire support.

Fire support units that routinely receive errant data through CFF requests, naturally, painstakingly ensure they catch inaccuracies before they become fatal. Because the FSO does not trust the data, his hyper-analysis of each request bogs down the process.

Units that are well-trained in target location techniques will have a quicker response time from their fire support cells. Knowing that target location data is dependable allows the FSO to be

more involved in verifying data and executing the mission rather than being slow to commit.

The Bradley Commander in the first scenario could have been the victim of poor target location training. With the urgency of the situation, he may have hurriedly delivered an inaccurate grid that was fatal to his crew.

But his was not the only mistake. The company FSO, not taking into consideration the requester's location, had apparently decided to execute the fire without clearing it.

When the lieutenant's voice exploded over the speaker remote, it was obvious he was in dire straits. Three BMPs were moving in his direction; his Bradley had thrown a track and he needed immediate help. The FSO was his only hope.

During the transmission of the CFF request, the FSO noticed info was missing from the request and it was improperly formatted. But the FSO thought it was no time to conduct training—the lieutenant needed help and needed it right away. The FSO failed to clear the fires.

*Understanding Procedures at the Lowest Level.* The Abrams Tank Commander in the second scenario was probably the victim of ignorance. He did not understand the need for clearing fires or the amount of time needed to execute safe, accurate fires. As products of simulation exercises, soldiers expect that once they make the call, immediate results will follow.

The time needed to properly clear a target varies with each situation. It is largely dependent on what sector-of-fire the target is in and who is responsible for that sector-of-fire.

Units well-trained on well-conceived battle drills for clearing fires will have the best chance of success during grave situations, but the dismissal of this process is *not* an option.

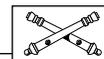
Helping maneuver shooters understand this process will give them tactical patience under pressure.

*Knowledge is Power.* Through fire support conferences, the 1st Infantry Division educates division senior leaders on methods and applications of indirect fires. Through simulations, these

principles can be applied and analyzed. Through training exercises, we can see the effects these applications have on the battlefield.

The Maneuver Shooter Program can give first-line soldiers up to commanders an appreciation for what happens when a fire supporter doesn't adjust fire off a preplanned target. They can begin to get a feel for the amount of time it takes to "lift and shift" fires using antiquated systems. Leaders can gain insights into the necessity for clearing fires and the time needed to make that happen. Then they can begin thinking about how to minimize the times and fight with fires more effectively.

But all must understand that the enemy in the training and simulation events is not real, and nothing but actual combat can cause the urgency and vicious effects these events can have on soldiers calling for fires to save their lives. The decisions that have the most critical impact on victory or defeat are made at the lowest levels. It is an absolute necessity to ensure frontline leaders have enough training and information to execute those decisions with confidence.



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